

Hezekiah Brett – 'Cut in Two by an Express'

This article expands on an earlier version that can be seen at the website of [Railway Work, Life & Death](#), a project which improves our knowledge and understanding of British and Irish railway worker accidents from the later 19th century to the start of the Second World War.

My connection with Hezekiah Brett is that he was a cousin of my 2x great grandfather Francis Dalby (1821-1902).

Francis Howcutt
23 April 2024
francishowcutt@gmail.com

When those reading the *Leicester Chronicle* on Saturday 25 May 1895 turned to page 8, they were confronted with this headline – '*Horrible Railway Fatality At Glen – A Man Cut In Two By An Express*'. It flagged up a report about Hezekiah Brett, aged 62, of Blaby who had been weakened by influenza and unable to follow his usual employment as a brickyard labourer for 12 months. He had a reputation as a hard-working man and his dependence on his family had preyed on his mind. On the previous Wednesday, it appears he walked along the bridle road from Glen Parva to Aylestone, climbed the embankment onto the railway a short distance from Blaby station (on the London and North Western Railway) and sat on the corner of the bridge. As the 8.15 Midland Railway express from Leicester to Birmingham approached, he jumped across the rails in front of him, as a result of which his body was cut in two. The inquest held at the Union Inn, Blaby returned a verdict of suicide during temporary insanity. However, the reasons mentioned at the inquest may not have been the only misfortunes on his mind as he headed for the railway bridge.



Blaby station [1]

Hezekiah, the third child of William Brett and his wife Sarah Dalby, was born at Blaby about 1832 and probably lived throughout his life in that village, which is about five miles south of the centre of Leicester. Sarah was only 26 years old when she died in 1833. It seems William (c.1805-1855) remained at Blaby but did not remarry and was unable to bring up his three young children singlehanded. The 1841 census records Hezekiah and his older sister and brother as living at Glen Ford Road with their

grandparents Francis and Grace Dalby. Francis died in 1848 but the grandchildren remained with Grace at least until the 1851 census when the four of them were sharing a house at Chapel Street with Sarah's brother James Dalby, his wife and three of their offspring. By this stage "Ez" (as he was recorded by the enumerator) was one of the many local residents earning a living as a framework knitter.

On Boxing Day 1853, Hezekiah married Mary Dale of Blaby. Both made their marks in the register. The couple had six children:

	Born	Married	Died
John	c.1854	n/a	1870
William	c.1857	Ada Swanwick 1884	1934
George	1859	n/a	1886
Eliza	1861	George Green 1894	[2]
Jane	1864	Arthur Amos Wale 1888	1906
Charles	1867	n/a	1868

Mary's final pregnancy did not go well; the birth of her child Charles was registered late in 1867 and she was buried at Blaby on 8 December of that year, having reached the age of 33. Hezekiah's second marriage – to his second cousin Mary Webster, formerly Hyde (c.1832-1925) – took place at Blaby on 13 September 1869. [3] Mary was also widowed, her first husband, Thomas Webster, having died late in 1865. Mary had seven children living when she married Hezekiah [4] and he had five. A further contingent of six children were born to Hezekiah's second marriage:

	Born	Married	Died
Alfred	1869	Eliza Copson 1898	1961
John	c.1871	n/a	1886
Arthur Charles	1872	Hannah Mary Smith 1895	1966
Sarah Ann	1874	n/a	1914
Ada	1876	David Charles Clarke 1897	1954
Ernest	1878	n/a	1878

For much of his life, Hezekiah lived in very crowded conditions. Only three children were living with him and his first wife at Wrights Yard in 1861, but ten years later Hezekiah's home at Coltmans Yard in Chapel Street was teeming with a total of eleven children aged from 17 years to three months, in addition to the two adults. Chapel Street was the address recorded for the family in 1881, when Hezekiah and Mary shared a house with nine children and a grandson. In 1891, they were at Wrights Yard with four children present on the census night. 1861 was the last census that described Hezekiah as a framework knitter – an occupation that in the latter part of the nineteenth century was being increasingly undermined by factory work. Subsequent censuses recorded him in arguably less well-paid and less skilled roles as an agricultural or brickmaking labourer.

The bereavements that stalked Hezekiah's life included the deaths of five of his twelve biological children – two as infants, two in their teens and George at the age of 27. His daughter-in-law Ada, the wife of William, was in her 30s when she was buried at Blaby in 1893. An ongoing sadness was recorded when Hezekiah's widow completed the form for the 1911 census. She shared two rooms at James Street, Blaby with her unmarried daughter Sarah Ann whom she described as "Invalid during Life".

At least one of Hezekiah's children ventured far afield from Blaby. Ada and her husband David Charles Clarke emigrated to America in 1907. Ada died at Kalamazoo, Michigan. [5] When in 1920 they applied for a US passport prior to visiting England to see relatives, Ada's photograph was submitted with the application. The picture seems at some stage to have been mutilated, but most of the image is original.



Ada (Brett) Clarke [6]

Notes

[1] Image by Ben Brooksbank, licensed under the [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/) licence, via Wikimedia Commons.

[2] The 1911 census of 8 Elton Street Leicester records Eliza Green as a widow aged 42 who had been born at Blaby.

[3] Mary Hyde was a daughter of Daniel Hyde (1796-1872) & Grace Orton (1797-1853). Both that Grace Orton and Sarah Dalby (mother of Hezekiah Brett) were grandchildren of William Orton & Grace Brooks who married at Blaby in 1753.

[4] In her 1911 census schedule, Mary Brett reported that she had had a total of 15 children, four of whom had already died. Two of the six children she had with Hezekiah had died by that stage, leaving a total of nine children born before their marriage, two of which were already dead at the time of Mary's second marriage (i.e. William Hyde 1852-1854 and Maria Webster 1857-1858).

[5] Michigan Deaths and Burials, 1800-1995, FamilySearch.

<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FH3J-QLQ>

[6] United States Passport Applications, 1795-1925, FamilySearch.

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QV5B-HNS3>

Francis Howcutt is Digital Publications Editor of Northamptonshire Record Society and curates its page on Facebook. His index to the 1674 hearth tax lists for the whole of Northamptonshire contains over 22,000 records and can be found at:

<https://www.parishchest.com/northamptonshire-hearth-tax-index-1673-1674-10546.php>

He administers Facebook groups for those interested in Naseby, Thornby & Haselbech History; Howcutt & Howcott History and Norwood Society Local History, London.